

# Communication at the Autism Association

WestWood Spice

“Communication usually fails - except by  
chance” Osmo Wiio, Finnish researcher

# Aims

- **A Communication Strategy**
- **A Communication Policy**
- **A Communication Protocol**  
(best practice guidelines for organisational communications)

# A 3 prong strategy

- Parent and Staff Survey
- Case Study
- Consultations/conversations
  - parent/family groups
  - staff consultative committee
  - staff groups
  - management group
  - Board

# Parents and Staff Survey

# 3 kinds of communication content...

- 1) about autism (the subject)
- 2) about the Autism Association (the organisation)
- 3) about a particular client or family (the relationship)

# 3 kinds of communication purpose...

(from the Association's position)

- a) to give information (to tell)
- b) to request/seek information (to ask)
- c) to receive information (to listen)

# Purpose and Content...

- a) to give information (to tell)
  - b) to request/seek information (to ask)
  - c) to receive information (to listen)
- 
- 1) about autism (the subject)
  - 2) about the Autism Association (the organisation)
  - 3) about a particular client or family (the relationship)
- (ie 9 types of communication)

For each of these 9  
combinations  
we asked parents and staff

- How well does the Autism Association perform in this area?
- How important is this area to you?

We used a 5 point scale

5 = very high

1 = very low

# Some findings

- Staff responses and parent responses were very consistent.
- Both considered communication generally to be **VERY IMPORTANT (4.5)**.
- Both said the most important kind of communication for the Association was giving/telling - first about particular clients/families, then about Autism, then about the Association.

## Some findings (cont.)

- The Association tends to perform best in the areas that are seen as the most important.
- The average performance is 3.4  
- ie above average, but room for improvement.

Answers were supplemented by comments, and these were often very useful: eg

“The newsletter is great...(but) we need more info about therapies and therapists...and groups our child can attend”

# Some findings (cont.)

- Parents rate the Association as performing best in the area of giving/telling ie the area they saw as the most important.
- They said the Association was best at giving info about Autism, then about particular clients/families and then about the Association itself.
- They said the Association was least good at receiving/listening - first (worst) about particular clients/families, then about autism and then about the Association itself.

# Some findings (cont.)

- Staff also rate the Association as performing best in the area of giving/telling, but their focus was on clients/families.
- So they said the Association was best at giving info about particular clients/families, then about receiving information about clients/families and then requesting information about clients/families.
- They said the Association was least good at giving info about itself, then at requesting information about itself, and then at listening to information about Autism.

# Some key recommendations

- Communications training for staff and families
- Formal staff induction program for all staff
- Three year focus on “communication excellence”  
- communicating openly, honestly & generously.
- Develop a Communication Protocol - best practice guidelines for good communication
- Revitalise “Keynotes” public newsletter, incl's publish on Association's website

# Recommendations (cont.)

- Publish a regular internal staff newsletter
- Revamp, clarify and train on new complaints & grievances policies
- Trial an external facilitator to provide free and confidential advice on complaints and grievance handling to individual staff, clients or family members and to help resolve disputes
- Establish an ongoing Staff Communications Advisory Committee
- Build recognition of the importance of good communications into role descriptions of all staff